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EDUCATION IN A TIME OF CRISIS

Only those who have known the years before the first World War can fully appreciate the magnitude of the crisis we are undergoing. During those years most people believed that in western civilization man had reached a more or less definitive state of historical development. In accordance with this attitude the past was interpreted in a somewhat peculiar way.

We had heard about wars, about persecution, about intolerance; we had heard about terrible ignorance and its dreadful consequences; we had heard about sinister superstitions, persecution of witches, social injustices, the pride and arrogance of the mighty, corrupt courts, torture, and whatnot. But we also had learned that since 1600, or somewhat earlier, when man's eyes were opened, there had been irresistible progress. We became infinitely tolerant. We were inclined to pardon even before we understood. The "Dark Ages", thank heaven, were gone!

There was general optimism and a feeling of security. And then suddenly that shocking disappointment to optimism and security! Suddenly history with all its good and bad passions was alive again. Suddenly everything which we thought gone forever was here again, and that progressive state which we expected to be the final and lasting one had disappeared.

Today the ominous symptoms of still greater changes are showing themselves. All the principles on which the social order of the nineteenth century were laid are challenged. They have become suspect; even the longing for security has itself become suspect. There is a dissolution of the old order, but only vague signs of the new one. It is a time of lasting and continuous crises.

The younger generation reacts in its own way. It is distrustful—the young people do not want to be betrayed by solemn words used by the church, the state, the social leaders, the universities. Did not Nietzsche and Freud teach us what is hidden behind such words? Should we not be aware of conscious or unconscious hypocrisy? Are these words not the weapons of the weak?

What can be done under these circumstances? What can the older generation do for the younger one? What can education in such a time of crisis mean and do?

There are many opinions and proposals held by different groups. Some of the more important of these may be outlined: